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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0220
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0144
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0069
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0122
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0080
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0001
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 0041
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0001
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0001
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 0001
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 0001
RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI 0009
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0001
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 1413
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000990

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN - MANAGING AFGHANISTAN'S NEIGHBORS

REF: STATE 85136

CLASSIFIED BY: Matt Purl, A/DCM, POL, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Tajikistan's leadership wants stability in Afghanistan, and sees President Karzai as the country's best bet to continue toward that goal. The Tajik government insists it takes no sides in the election, and is not interested in meddling in the ethnic power balance in Afghanistan. Tajikistan's influence over events in Afghanistan is limited, but it would use what influence it has to support a peaceful outcome from the elections. Specific answers keyed to questions posed in reftel are below at para. 7. End Summary.

TAJIKISTAN JUST WANTS PEACE AND QUIET, AND KARZAI

¶2. (C) A/DCM presented reftel demarche on August 19 to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Director of North America and Europe Khusrav Nosiri (the Asia and Africa Director, who oversees relations with Afghanistan, was unavailable). Nosiri commented that Tajikistan supported "free and fair" elections in Afghanistan, and that public opinion in Tajikistan was in favor of a stable and united Afghanistan. He emphasized that ethnic issues internal to Afghanistan did not matter to the people of Tajikistan.

¶3. (C) A/DCM discussed the elections with Suhrob Sharipov, the Director of the Tajikistan Institute of Strategic Research. Sharipov also emphasized the importance of Afghan unity for Tajikistan. Sharipov stated openly that President Rahmon wished for Karzai's victory in the elections, and asserted that during the recent quadrilateral summit in Dushanbe Rahmon had told Karzai "you are my candidate." He predicted that there would not be a second round of voting, and that if a second round were to take place, Abdullah Abdullah would likely settle for a position of power in Karzai's government rather than contest the second round. Sharipov doubted that serious tensions between ethnic groups would arise so long as both Afghan Tajiks and government-allied Pashtuns continued to face the Taliban insurgency; but the Tajik-Pashtun power balance would again come

to the fore when the war with the Taliban ended.

¶4. (C) Sharipov did think it possible that Abdullah Abdullah, if he received more than 30 percent of the vote, might see himself as strong enough to contest the validity of the election results on the premise that he had been the real winner, and that this might lead to violence. Noting that Northern Alliance leaders had been based in Dushanbe for a long period when the Taliban took control of most of northern Afghanistan, Sharipov said that Tajikistan's leaders would use their personal contacts with ex-alliance members to push for restraint.

¶5. (C) A/DCM also spoke with Ilhom Rahmatov, a retired senior officer of the Russian FSB, who is of Tajik origin and who spent much of his career in Afghanistan. His view was that Tajikistan had little or no influence over the Tajik population in Afghanistan, because the decades of isolation from Afghanistan enforced by the Soviet Union had severed most family and business ties that had existed earlier. Like official interlocutors, he viewed Tajikistan's main interest in Afghanistan as stability, with little interest in the ethnic question. He also commented that continuation of the conflict in Afghanistan was in the interest of Russia, China, Iran, and India, as each country gained from the trouble the conflict caused to its enemies or regional competitors.

¶6. (C) The British DCM met separately with Deputy Chairman of the Committee for State Security General Gafarov on August 18. She reported that when she asked Gafarov about the upcoming

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elections, he commented that Karzai was the only candidate with a real chance to win the election, and that anyway "everyone knows" that Karzai is "an American puppet."

ASSESSMENT OF INTERESTS AND INFLUENCE

¶7. (C) Following are answers to reftel's request:

A: Tajikistan's overriding interest is greater stability in Afghanistan. Conflict in Afghanistan deters investment in Tajikistan, keeps it dependent on Russia for security, massive smuggling of Afghan narcotics undermines the rule of law in Tajikistan, and Afghan extremist groups directly threaten Tajikistan's military security. While Tajiks in Tajikistan share a common language with Tajiks in Afghanistan, their cultural and political views are still strongly Soviet-influenced, and they tend to view all Afghans, regardless of ethnicity, as drug smugglers, criminals, and terrorists. The Government of Tajikistan is very interested in preventing a return of the Taliban to power, and is sophisticated enough to understand that this goal will not be served by any effort to promote Tajiks over Pashtuns in the Afghan power balance.

More parochially, the Government of Tajikistan probably also wants to see Karzai reelected because a democratic and peaceful change of administration in the region would highlight the shortcomings of Tajikistan's sham democracy - in short, countries should not change their president, in the Tajik view. Tajikistan will hold parliamentary elections in February 2010, and does not need a troubling regional example of democracy leading to actual change.

B: As our interlocutors emphasized, Tajikistan will use what influence it has to urge restraint by Afghan political leaders after the elections. Every analysis of Afghan politics we have heard from Tajiks has come down to the basic view that Afghan politics is clan- and tribe-based, that democracy in Afghanistan is a sham, and that conflicts will be resolved by backroom deals. So it seems likely that they will urge privately that the candidates avoid any confrontation which could alienate Afghanistan's foreign supporters, and find some accommodation of each other. In public the Government of Tajikistan will endorse a Karzai victory, and possibly remain silent if there is a second electoral round.

C: If there is a second round, or any violence between the factions contesting this election, the Government of Tajikistan will be cautious in its public and private response, and will likely be receptive to our advice, given the Tajik's desire to show themselves to be solid partners on Afghanistan. Their efforts will be constructive, but of limited value.

QUAST